April 27, 2019

The Road to Emmaus Sermon Luke 24:13-35
When you can't see Jesus

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Have you ever had that experience when you can't see something and it's right in front of you? This week I needed to give my son his milk and I knew Monica had put some in the fridge but I couldn't find it. When I opened the fridge it wasn't there and when I moved some of the food and other items it wasn't there either. So I called Monica and I asked her if she had put the milk in the fridge and she said she had and I told her I couldn't find it. I looked again but nothing. When she came home she found it in less than 5 seconds.

I think what happened is that when I looked in one part of the fridge, the bottle ran to a different part of the fridge. And then when I looked to other side, it scooted behind the mayonnaise. It's frustrating when you can't see something but you're told it's there. Now a baby's milk bottle matters for our family, but in the overall scheme of things it's not a big deal. Does this ever happen to us with the big things in life? Where we're looking for something important but just can't see it?

How about when you look for God but can't sense his presence? We look for him, and we're told by our pastors and more spiritually attuned friends that "he's right there!" but we just can't see him for ourselves. Instead of sensing God you feel like he's gone or like he'll talk to anyone but you. When you can't see God or sense Christ's presence what should you do? That's a dark place to be at but it's similar to where some of Jesus' followers found themselves Sunday after his crucifixion.

The last time they saw Jesus he was dead. He was gone. They thought he was never coming back. They'd made it through the last couple days, but are sad and depressed. But now they've heard word from several women who followed Jesus that his body wasn't in the tomb and that angels had appeared to them telling them Jesus is alive. They don't believe and just feel more confusion and darkness. They'd come to Jerusalem for the Passover feast and now it's time for them to go home.

> **Luke 24:13-16** (NIV) Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. 14 They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. 15 As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; 16 but they were kept from recognizing him.

So these two friends are walking home from Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus. It's about 7 miles from Jerusalem, or 10 kilometers. When we were in France our European GPS pronounced it "kilo-meters." And as they're talking about the crucifixion and empty tomb Jesus himself comes up to them and begins to walk alongside them. This is actually the first time in Luke 24 where we see Jesus alive. The angels announced it in the first 12 verses, but this is the first time Luke shows the living-breathing Jesus to his readers, and he does it in the most unassuming way. Jesus just starts walking alongside them.

The Greek literally says "their eyes were kept from recognizing him". It's like when you're walking your dog and she sees a squirrel and lunges for it. You have to restrain her and hold her back. Their eyes wanted to see Jesus but God restrains recognition. He holds them back. Why would God do that? Because God wants them, and us, to see Jesus, but not yet with our eyes. He wants us to first see Jesus a different way.

> **Luke 24:17-**18 He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"
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> They stood still, their faces downcast. 18 One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

Luke gives us the name Cleopas because he's citing his source. He's showing us this account is reliable.

> **Luke 24:19-21** "What things?" he asked.
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> "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. 20 The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; 21 but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place.

They call Jesus a prophet. They no longer say Jesus was the "Messiah" or "Christ." They've lost faith. They're finding it too hard to believe. It's too dark. Jesus is dead he must have just been a prophet like the prophets of old who died. He can't possibly be the Messiah chosen by God. The Messiah is supposed to come and liberate his people, and Jesus is dead. When things get dark in our life, when we lose our jobs or a loved one dies, a war, famine, or tragedy, and our hearts don't sense Christ, it's easy to say, "Maybe he's not God, maybe Jesus is not as powerful as I thought." But they were wrong. They couldn't see hope in that moment. But hope is just around the corner.

> **Luke 24:22-24** In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning 23 but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. 24 Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus."

In Israel at that time Jewish rabbis disagreed over whether or not women could testify in court. Many thought their witness was unreliable, so if you're going to make up a story this isn't the best way to do it. So this is a proof to believe the Bible's account is true. Instead of being written in a way so as to appear real in its culture and time, having men be the first witnesses, it's a historical account of what happened. But Cleopas and his traveling companion don't know about that. They have trouble <u>believing the women</u>, citing the other disciples who didn't see Jesus. But their memories are selective because in just a few verses (v34) they're going to remember that Jesus already appeared to Simon (Peter), which outside of this mention isn't shown in the gospel accounts.

When we're struggling, maybe fatigued or frustrated, and can't see Jesus and can only think of everything wrong with our lives, we should pause and check our memories and ask, "Am I being selective in what I am remembering?" How has Jesus done good things for me and shown himself to me in ways in the past. If he's been good for years and years why would I assume he would stop now? Lord, may we not have selective memories but memories full of the goodness of Christ.

But now it's time for Jesus to answer them. And he actually begins to open their eyes to him, but not yet in the visible way they would prefer, and we would too. Instead he points to himself in the Old Testament.

> **Luke 22:25-26** He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"

Jesus scolds them for not having hope and not realizing what has really happened. They thought the Messiah was going to be a political liberator but Jesus shows them this isn't what the Messiah was going to do. He didn't come to be victorious like a military leader, but to achieve victory another kind of way, through his own suffering. Now this is a confusing concept to them and all Jews because it doesn't clearly say in the Old

Testament that the Messiah is going to suffer. But if we were to look at two passages, Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53, they tell us about one who is chosen by God and will suffer, especially the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. So although the suffering Messiah isn't clearly stated, it is implied throughout the Scriptures.

Just like our Messiah suffered so too Christians will suffer. God doesn't promise us pain free lives where we always feel his presence near us. We will go through trial and darkness and sometimes feel alone (James 1:2-4). It's actually pretty normal to go through times when you struggle to see Christ because of everything going on in your life, but God can use this time to draw you nearer to Christ. One of the ways we draw near to Christ is by meditating on and reading the Scriptures.

> **Luke 24:27** And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

Jesus goes through a bird's eye view of the Old Testament to say that it's all pointing towards him. It's not that every word is about Jesus but that they tell us about our sins and so our need for Jesus and a coming savior. Many passages even prefigure Christ—tell us about him without telling us exactly.

- The opening chapters of Genesis talk about the descendent of Eve who is going to crush the serpent.
- Noah's ark shows us what God's judgment is like against sin and we need rescue only God can provide.
- Abraham shows us the type of faith we need to have in God and his promises.
- Abraham's son Isaac carries firewood (a tree) up a mountain so he can be a sacrifice just like Christ carries the cross.
- Joseph was betrayed by his brothers and Jesus was betrayed by his disciples.
- Moses was almost killed by an evil king at his birth and so was Jesus.
- The whole sacrificial system of sheep and cattle points to the need for a lasting sacrifice.
- Samson gave his life to rescue his people and so did Jesus.
- King David, a good but imperfect king, prefigures Jesus, the perfect king.

And the list goes on and on and on as we think about all the ways the Scriptures point to Christ Jesus. He is the fulfillment of it all. So what's the application here? ***When you can't see Jesus, look to the Scriptures.*** When you can't see what Jesus is doing in your life or can't hear him speaking to you, look to the Scriptures. Go to your Bible. See him there. Hear him there.

Honestly, I get a bit frustrated when people ask me if God talks to me. I don't know if I've ever heard Jesus audibly speak to me. I get strong impressions and thoughts through prayer that seem from him and the Holy Spirit, but does that count? But at the same time he does talk to me through his Word. If you want to hear God's voice, read his words, read the Scriptures. I do believe that as we read and meditate on the Bible the Holy Spirit takes what we are reading and helps apply it to our hearts and lives. So as you're reading Scripture and sensing the way you should apply it to your life that's perhaps the Holy Spirit and in that way Jesus does speak to us. *When you can't see Jesus (or hear him), look to the Scriptures.*

As the two travelers listen to Jesus talking they begin to realize they've missed something. Jesus had come to liberate his people, but not as a mighty warrior but as a sacrificial lamb. But still they don't recognize the one standing in front of them is Jesus. But now they've seen him in the Scriptures and so they're ready.

> **Luke 24:28-31** As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. 29 But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.
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> 30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.

Jesus pretends to keep going but like good hosts they invite Jesus in to stay with them the night. And when he breaks the bread, much like he did at the feeding of the 5,000 and the Last Supper (Luke 9:16; 22:19), then finally he stops restraining their eyes and they recognize him for who he is as he hands them the bread. Then he's gone. And what do they immediately marvel at—the scriptures!

> **Luke 24:32** They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

But we don't yet get to see Jesus like they did. Luke knows that we his contemporary audience won't be able to see Jesus so he wants us to go to the Scriptures to see him. The more we understand God's word the more our hearts will burn for God. You want to sense God's presence? You want to know Jesus is alive? Dive into God's word! ***When you can't see Jesus, look to the Scriptures.*** But they don't stop with the Scriptures because they focus specifically on the resurrection—Jesus rising from the dead.

> **Luke 24:33-35** They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together 34 and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." 35 Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

Once they understand how all of Scriptures points to the Messiah needing to suffer and die and rise again it changes everything. They believe! Of course the descendent of Eve would be struck by the serpent, of course it was the Father's will to crush him for our iniquities, of course Jesus is the one and final sacrificial lamb that takes away the sins of the world. Of course the resurrection happened because that was the plan all along. ***When you can't see Jesus, look to the Scriptures and to his resurrection.***

When Terry preached two weeks ago he suggested I might love quoting Timothy Keller. I can't remember who told me this story or if it's an urban legend but I once heard that a church was going through a hiring process and when they interviewed a pastor they asked him if he liked Lord of the Rings and he said yes. They said that if he came to their church he could never quote Lord of the Rings because the previous pastor brought up Lord of the Rings every single week. So it could be worse!

Tim Keller talks about the movie *The Sixth Sense*. He said you can only see that movie twice because once you know the ending it changes how you see the whole thing. The ending is shocking. I heard about the ending before I ever saw it and if you don't know the ending or have not seen the movie, I'm sorry but it came out in 1999. You've had your chance. To quote Keller, "I don't want to spoil the ending for you but Bruce Willis is dead." Bruce Willis, a child psychologist (super believable), is trying to help a young boy who sees dead people and it turns out Bruce Willis is one of the people who is dead. And if you go back through the movie it's so obvious he is dead. His wife doesn't look at him or interact with him. No one really talks to him except for the young boy. You can't help but watch the whole movie in light of the ending.

But the the story of Jesus is the exact opposite of *The Sixth Sense*. When you get to the end Jesus isn't dead but alive. The gospel is the good news that the hero of the story is alive and well. And now as you go back through the Scriptures you can't help but read them in light of that good news. It's all about him. It's all pointing to our need for him. It's all about this coming savior who is going to pay the ultimate sacrifice. It's all about Jesus, his suffering, his death, and his life-giving resurrection so that anyone who repents of their

sins and puts their faith and trust in him will one day rise again too. And when we're frustrated and discouraged and can't sense God's presence that's exactly what we need to focus on—the Bible and how he rose again from the dead. ***When you can't see Jesus, look to the Scriptures and to his resurrection.***

Discussion Questions

These questions are great for small groups, bible studies, or personal reflection:

1. Have you ever struggled to recognize God's presence in your life?
2. Have you ever had a friend struggle to see Jesus in their lives? How did you respond?
3. How does Jesus come alongside the two travelers on the road to Emmaus? What's his approach?
4. When you think of a passage from the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) that points to Jesus, what do you think of? Anything specific?
5. What do you want to remember from this study of the Road to Emmaus?
6. How does the Road to Emmaus remind us of our need for Jesus?
7. What's one thing you want to pray about in response this week?

Luke Sermon Series

Go through the Gospel of Luke with Jonathan Romig in this sermon series playlist: The Certain Gospel.

Resource Recommendations

Each of the following books are **affiliate links**, which means we get a small percentage if you purchase the resource through the link. We also recommend checking out your local library or thrift store.

Companions in the Darkness: Seven Saints Who Struggled with Depression and Doubt by Diana Gruver.

Luke 12-24 for You: For Reading, for Feeding, for Leading (God's Word for You Commentary Series) by Mike McKinley

Read this sermon on Substack and Blogger.

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Endnotes

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A Handbook on the Gospel of Luke. Logos Bible Software. Accessed 4/26/2019. Luke 24:15-16.

Timothy Keller calls this a footnote. Tim Keller | Jesus Vindicated | Luke 24 | TGC13 https://youtu.be/ofwzpwE9lZQ Accessed 4/26/2019.

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Rev. Dr. Jonathan Romig originally preached this sermon at Cornerstone Congregational Church *in Westford, MA on April 27, 2019 when he served there as Pastor. Jonathan attended Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (*GCTS*) where he earned his Master of Divinity (M.Div) and Doctor of Ministry (D.Min). You can contact him at pastorjromig@gmail.com.*

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